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ABSTRACT

Written for both new and experienced tutors at the Washburn University Writing Center, this handbook describes procedures, presents guidelines, and discusses writing center resources for the student writing consultants. After describing the writing center and its mission, the handbook offers a job description for writing consultants. The handbook then discusses procedure and guidelines on missed appointments, unused time, leaving early, appointments, end of appointment, drop-in times, and canceling a shift. The handbook then addresses the resources at the writing center, including printed materials, computer hardware, periodicals, and the electronic bulletin board listserv. (RS)

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HANDBOOK FOR WRITING CONSULTANTS

Revised Edition

August 1995

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TO: Writing Consultants  
FROM: Roy Sheldon, Writing Center Coordinator  
DATE: August 24, 1995  
SUBJECT: Handbook for Writing Consultants, Revised Version

When new writing consultants come on aboard I usually spend some time discussing with them their responsibilities for their shifts. As an aid to this discussion, I have come up with a list for new tutors' reference. This listing will supplement the discussion we have and help the new tutor to remember his or her responsibilities. I have also listed some of the Writing Center's resources and materials. I thought I would pass along a copy to experienced tutors as well, for their reference, even though they already know most of the information.

Let me know if you have any questions over this revised version of the handbook.

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### Mission and Description of the Writing Center

The Writing Center is an integral part of the Department of English at Washburn University. It serves as a resource for students and instructors in the English Composition Program, including English 100, Developmental Writing; English 101, Freshman Composition; English 102, Honors English; English 207, Report Writing; English 208, Business & Technical Writing; English 300, Junior Composition; and for students and instructors in courses throughout the University where writing is expected. Instructors may use the Center to provide additional instructional help, through tutoring or use of texts, for their students. The Center is also a source for texts, workbooks, and handouts related to writing. Community members are also invited to use the Center. We are located in Morgan 257.

The Writing Center provides free tutorial services to Washburn students and the Topeka community to help them develop their writing abilities. Writing consultants help individuals with the development of ideas, organization of papers, sentence structure and grammar, punctuation and spelling, and clarity and style. We are not a proofreading nor an editing service. We want to help individuals become better writers, to learn how to use the conventions, the rules, and the process of writing better.

Writing consultants are usually English or English Education majors but may be art, business or other majors. Some already have their degree. Most are paid; some are volunteers. All are interested in writing and helping others develop their writing abilities. Financial support for the Center comes from the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences and from the Department of English.

In the Center we work with people from different age groups and cultural backgrounds on their essays, term papers, memos, letters, and reports. Generally we avoid critiquing pieces of fiction (poems, short stories, plays, novels, etc.), except for purely grammatical concerns or questions. The Headwaters group on campus serves fiction writers' needs, and fiction writers should contact the department secretary for more detailed information about Headwaters.

The Writing Center at MO 257 has several sections: a student lounge/reception area, computer workstations, and a tutoring area separated by dividers. The tutoring area is large enough for two writing consultants to tutor at the same time. Because we do not have a receptionist nor a telephone, the schedule board is posted outside the reception area so students may sign up on their own. The Writing Center Coordinator's office is in 250 Morgan.

### Writing Consultant Job Description

Listed below is a basic job description for a writing consultant at Washburn University.

A Washburn University writing consultant:

1. works with students individually or in small groups to develop their basic writing abilities;

2. communicates well with students by establishing rapport and maintaining a friendly, helpful, patient, and interested attitude and demeanor;

3. assists students to develop their abilities through asking questions and helping them internalize as well as express the "correct" answers by explaining concepts and techniques and giving them practice using those concepts and techniques;
4. helps students understand their instructor's written comments and priorities in writing when they are evident in those comments (always referring the student back to the instructor when appropriate);
5. avoids criticizing instructors or agreeing with students' disparaging remarks about instructors;
6. does not proofread or write students' papers for them (but instead works directly with the student in an interactive manner);
7. keeps instructors advised (through report forms or discussion) of their students' progress in tutorial sessions (unless the student requests that the instructor not be informed);
8. keeps appointments on time, stays alert, and minimalizes any distractions to tutoring;
9. communicates with other writing consultants and the Coordinator, sharing experiences, questions, and insights;
10. refers students to other support services, such as the Counseling Center, the Academic Advising Center, etc., when appropriate;
11. works to develop a problem-solving attitude to help the Center improve its services, its environment, and its publicity measures;
12. tries to be open to considering new ideas and techniques in tutoring, participating in staff development as well as accepting the challenging and the routine aspects of the writing consultant position;
13. avoids allowing any political, social, educational, philosophical, racial, or sexual biases or preferences to have a part in his or her tutoring relationships with individuals;
14. takes nothing for granted when tutoring and works to discover the student's level of knowledge and ability.
15. helps maintain and develop the services of the Center by performing non-tutoring administrative work, including work related to tutorial, handout, & library record keeping, filing, computer resource servicing, and publicizing the Center as long as it does not interfere with his or her tutoring sessions with individuals and is confined to unused sign-up or drop-in times or other paid or volunteered hours.

To qualify for a writing consultant position, an individual should be willing to follow the above guidelines. In addition, he or she needs to be enrolled for at least six hours of coursework in order to qualify for pay. Volunteers need not be enrolled. Tutoring in summers usually does not require any course enrollment. Writing Consultants funded through the work study program instead of the Dean's Office may have different enrollment requirements. The Center usually surveys students and/or faculty re its services and performance at least once a year.

## Writing Consultant Procedures and Guidelines

## Pre-shift

Try to arrive a few minutes early, and before your shift begins:

1. First check the schedule board outside the Center to see who has signed up for an appointment.
2. With those names go to the Resource Cabinet and check in the alphabetical file to see if those individuals have been to the Center before. That way you will know what they have been working on and with whom they have been working. (Even those persons you are familiar with may have seen another consultant since you have last talked with them.) The yellow report slips should give you an idea of areas of concern.
3. Check also for referral forms in the alphabetical file. On these the student's teacher will list areas of concern and priorities for the tutors to follow.
4. Set aside a number of Writing Center report forms so that you can record the results of your session with the student. (I suggest not putting their names on them in advance, in case the student does not show up.)
5. Check daily the second shelf of the cabinet for any notes to you or all tutors from the Coordinator or instructors.

## Shift

## Missed Appointments: Procedures

Now you are ready to begin your shift, but your first student does not show up!

You should get a missed appt. slip from the cabinet and send it to the student at his or her address or through the instructor. If records indicate who the instructor is, then

- 1) fill out the slip;
- 2) place the slip in a campus mail envelope, address it to the instructor, and place it in the instructor's mailbox in 258 MO. (If there is no mailbox there, place it in Sally Dyke's work box on the front of her desk. She will take care of it. If 258 MO is not open, leave the envelope in the cabinet and the next person on duty when 258 MO is open will find it and take it there.)

If there is no indication who the instructor is, then

- 1) check in the cabinet file for the latest copy of the W. U. Directory;
- 2) find out the student's name and address there;

- 3) fill out the slip, place it in a white business envelope, write the student's name and address on it;
- 4) seal it; make sure a return address is on it;
- 5) take it to 258 MO and place it in Sally's work box. (If 258 is not open, follow the steps above.)

If the student's address is not in the directory, then

- 1) check in a phone book in 258 MO;
- 2) if you have no luck there, fill out the slip, place it in a white business envelope, put the student's name on the envelope, take it to 258 MO and ask the secretary to check for the address at the Registrar's Office and send it out. (Sally has agreed to do this.)

#### How to Take Advantage of Unused Time on Shift; Staying Alert

For the remainder of the time slot for the missed appt. remain in or close to 257 MO because someone may drop in for help or have questions about how to get help (signing up for appts, drop-in times, etc.) Also, you may want to check our file to make sure our yellow report slips are alphabetical so we can get at them more easily. (They get out of order fast!) I also recommend making sure our environment looks the best that a former classroom can! I usually go around straightening chairs and tables, ordering our dated magazines, and cleaning debris off tabletops. Even more rarely I take the broom and dust pan in my office and sweep up in 257, since the janitors may not.

Other administrative things you could do are to make sure our reference texts are in their proper categories on the shelves and to check our handouts file to see if we are running low in a particular area. (Let me know what we need, and I will get the masters to Sally for duplication or run them off on the computer.)

I may ask you to complete particular record keeping/administrative work during time not signed up for during your shift, including such work as updating library records/entries and marking texts, modifying or creating handouts for students as well as modifying and transferring files for use on wuinfo. I may ask you to cancel times to do such work, particularly those unsigned for just before your shift begins.

While it is permissible to do your own schoolwork if no one comes in for help, please do so only as a final alternative after considering the suggestions above. Also, make every effort to stay alert while on duty. I know that late hours and a busy schedule can make it difficult to keep one's eyes open at times, but try to fortify yourself with coffee (available for only a dime next door in the English Office) or rework your schedule to obtain the necessary shuteye at home.

#### Leaving Early

If no one is signed up for your final appointment time or no one has come in for the final hour half hour of drop-in time, you may leave early if you have a meeting, appt., or class, but no earlier than ten minutes before the end of your shift.

### Appointments: Procedures & Guidelines

When a student arrives for an appointment make sure to ask for his or her name, since someone else may wander in at the same time.

Before working with the student find out the assignment. (It's even better if you can see the assignment sheet. Some instructors send up their sheets, and I will have them on Shelf 2 of the cabinet.)

### Tutoring

In working with a student it is best to maintain a dialogue (preferably through questions and answers), be patient, and show your interest in helping him or her. Different students work at different paces; some need more help. Remember your reading of the articles on tutoring and our discussions. Try not to contradict an instructor's written comments or agree when a student makes disparaging remarks about an instructor. (At times students will try to use our comments as support when arguing with an instructor.) We want to work to maintain friendly relations with instructors.

### Dealing with Disruptive Students

Though it is important to be patient, understanding, and tolerant, as a tutor you do not have to take verbal abuse or arguments from students. If a student becomes abusive or out of hand, ask that person to please quiet down or leave. Or leave yourself to report him or her to me, the department secretary, or to Security (through the nearest phone). It is important that we not tolerate disruptive or manipulative behavior because it only makes the offending student more of a basket case if he or she can get away with it.

### Proofreading

Another manipulative behavior is a request for proofreading. Any student should be sitting next to you when you are discussing his or her paper. Say no to the student who wants to drop off a paper so you can correct it and then will return to pick it up. I realize that some students need more help than others, but they should always be with you in order for them to understand or hear what you are suggesting to them and asking them to explain--so they may become better writers.

### Responding to Date Requests

Also be aware that some students may ask you for a date, whether there is a ring on your finger or not. I am sure you will be able to make a tactful response which will let the student know in a polite way how you feel. (Chances are the student will not be back if the date was his or her only real purpose for being there.)

### End of Appointment Procedures

1. Check with the student before he or she leaves to see whether he/she would like the visit reported to the instructor. (Some who come in on their own do not want their instructors to know.)

2. Encourage the student to plan ahead and sign up for another time in the Center before his/her next paper is due. It is better to go over a draft than to do a post mortem on a graded paper.
3. It is important for us to keep track of who comes to the Writing Center so we may report fairly accurate numbers to Dr. Stein and the Dean. Please fill out the individual report forms for each person's visit. (Blank forms are stored on shelf B of the cabinet.) Fill out the report form at the end of the session or at the end of your shift. Write the first and last name of the instructor and your full name (unless you are on a first-name basis with that person). Include a few sentences that sum up what happened during your work with the student. Ask any pertinent questions.
4. After you have finished completing the form, separate the yellow copy from the original and place it in the alphabetical file (under the student's name) in the cabinet. Take the original to the instructor's mailbox in 258 MO. If the instructor does not have a mailbox there, place the original in a campus mail envelope addressed to the instructor and place it in Sally's work box in 258. Keep the original on file with the yellow copy if the student does not want the teacher notified.

#### Drop-in Times: Procedures

Drop-in times are first-come, first-served. Remember that you do not need to work beyond the end of your drop-in or appointment times. Before your time begins, find out how many students are there for drop-in. Plan to work at least a half hour with each one. If more than two for the hour are there, ask the others to come back another time. At the end of your shift let the student know that your shift is over and that he or she can sign up for another time or come in during the next drop-in time. If the student persists, explain that you have other responsibilities you must meet but are willing to work with him or her again your next time on duty and show the student the schedule board. Usually this will work, but I have had a time or two where I just had to leave even after explaining the above and the student still wanted help. We are all working here part-time and need to meet our other responsibilities, whether or not students understand that.

Another suggestion you might make is that a student keep checking the board for a cancelled appointment or take the chance of coming in during another's appointment in case you finish early with that person, realizing that you may not finish early.

#### Final Shift Concerns

At the end of your shift please make sure everything is secure, especially if you are the last one for the day. Please make sure to close the cabinet and put any records away. Check to see that the latest schedule is up on the board and that past dated ones are taken down and placed in the old schedules folder in the cabinet. If you are working the last shift of the day, at the end of the shift please take a pen or pencil and draw angled lines over that day's listings if more than one day is covered on the sheet. Three or four of these lines will keep people from mistakenly signing up in a blank slot at the wrong (past) time.

### Cancelling Your Shift

If you have to cancel out, please call ahead as soon as possible or cancel out the times on the board as early as possible. Please let me know beforehand too. If I can cover for you, I will. If there is enough time and the needed information to notify those signed up ahead of time, please try to do so, and they can then reschedule.

I usually try to keep schedules posted for a week in advance, so if you know of an upcoming date when it will be impossible for you to work, let me know as soon as possible.

### Writing Center Resources

Other areas of the Writing Center that you need to be familiar with include:

#### Resource Cabinet

In this cabinet we keep most of our records. These records include:

- |                                                                                  |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. yellow slip copies of tutorial sessions<br>in an alphabetical file of folders | Box # 1     |
| 2. handouts or tutorial aids in sections<br>labeled: organization & development  | Box # 1 & 2 |
| mechanics & usage                                                                | 2 & 3       |
| sentence structure                                                               | 3           |
| diction                                                                          | 3           |
| employment correspondence                                                        | 3           |
| 3. file folders, including those for:<br>instructor/student directories          |             |
| course listings/bulletin                                                         |             |
| referral forms                                                                   | Box # 1     |
| current & past time schedules                                                    |             |
| Writing Center survey forms                                                      |             |
| missed appt. forms                                                               |             |
| Resource Library signout sheets                                                  |             |

New report forms, appt. reminder slips, business and campus mail envelopes are also stored in the cabinet. Boxes #4 and #5 contain extra copies of handouts in other boxes. On Shelf B there is a space for written messages. Please check it regularly. Or I may post a message on the cabinet door.

#### Resource Library

Our small library includes books in the following areas, which are usually marked on the shelves:

|                                           |              |             |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Rhetorics and Writing texts               | Bookcase # 1 | Shelf B & C |
| Style and Handbooks                       | 1            | C & D       |
| Workbooks                                 | 1            | A & B       |
| Readers                                   | 1            | E & F       |
| Literature and Research Guides            | 1            | D & E       |
| English as a Second Language              | 1            | F           |
| Tutoring, Writ. Ctr. Guides; Comp. Theory | 3            | C & E       |

| Language/Inclusive Language          | Bookcase # | Shelf   |
|--------------------------------------|------------|---------|
| Lit., Poetry, Drama; Lit. Criticism  | " 2, 3     | A, B    |
| Grammar/Linguistics                  | 3          | D       |
| Journals: CCC, College English, etc. | " 3        | D       |
| Writing Across the Curriculum        | " 2        | B       |
| Business and Technical Writing       | " 2        | E, F, G |
| Reading & Study Skills               | " 2        | D       |

Books may be checked out if patrons will sign the sign-out sheet in the folder in the cabinet. (Make sure the book and author are listed as well as the patron's name, address, and phone number.) Books not to be checked out are marked and are usually important handbooks and workbooks. Books are catalogued by bookcase/shelf/type on 3 x 5 cards stored in boxes on Shelf 1 of the cabinet.

### Computer Terminals & Resources

Our computer terminals are hooked up to the mainframe in the Computer Center. The laser printer in 257 MO is printer # 23 in WordMarc and is listed at the end of the WordPerfect printer menu. Make sure the printer is on before printing anything out. Also, please turn the printer and terminals (check the switch--not the screen) off at the end of your shift--if you are the last person working before 5 p.m. See me for how to use the printer and terminals.

Let me know if you would like to have your own account number in order to use the terminals. (We also have a Writing Center general account number that everyone can use.)

Our terminals are available to everyone to use, but faculty, staff, and students in English courses have first priority over the general population. Please make sure you sign the terminal sign-up sheet, if it is out, when using the computer. Also encourage students to do so as well. Then we can know how much the terminals are being used. We should try to avoid situations where a number of people want to use the terminals but a few are hogging them.

I encourage you to become familiar with the computer, particularly the Wordmarc and WordPerfect systems. Both are areas students who come to the Center will ask questions about.

On the computer table there are handbooks with different sections explaining the Computer Center and its resources. Look these over, and let me know if you have any questions.

The Writing Center has a resource section on the University Services menu of wuinfo. This section contains information about the Center, its hours, writing handouts, test-taking and business writing handouts, and information on the research paper and MLA/APA format. Explore this section as well as the reference section on wuinfo.

The Computer Center has purchased a grammar checker called Writer's Workbench (WWB) and will eventually place it on the mainframe for general use. We will probably assist students in using WWB once it is online. As of 24 Aug 1995, however, it was not online.

### Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Section

I have set out some interdisciplinary writing texts and assignments for faculty and students to peruse. These are presently in the bookcase labelled # 2, on Shelf D. Please help those interested find this section.

### Writing Lab Newsletter and Composition Chronicle

Please feel free to look through our copies of the above newsletters, which serve to help keep us up to date about issues and concerns in tutoring and composition. They're usually on the tutoring tables.

### WCenter Electronic Bulletin Board Listserv

If you have your own account on the WU computer system, you may be able to subscribe to listservs oriented to different interest groups. WCenter is one such listserv which allows you to read about individuals' questions and concerns nationwide about tutoring and writing centers and even respond to them via electronic mail. If you are interested in subscribing to WCenter (which is free), whose members are mostly writing center directors and tutors, please let me know.

### Bulletin Boards

Please help keep our bulletin boards informative and entertaining by sharing any items on English or writing that you come across.

### Staff Feedback & Development

The Coordinator will solicit feedback from writing consultants on how their tutoring is progressing and receive any feedback concerning tutors' concerns and/or issues relating to their job performance and/or the Coordinator's. Consultants may review the results of WCenter surveys related to their job performance and may on occasion give written as well as oral feedback to the Coordinator concerning job performance. Any appeals concerning actions by the Coordinator may be made to the Chair of the Dept. of English, the Coordinator's immediate supervisor. The Chair will advise the tutor of subsequent avenues for appeals.

The Coordinator or a representative will meet regularly with the Writing Consultants (once every one to three weeks, depending on the situation) either as a whole or individually to discuss issues related to WCenter tutoring, either pertaining to individual tutors' concerns or to overall important and/or current tutoring issues discussed in journals, at conferences, or via email on listservs. Tutors may be expected to read articles or postings for these individual or group meetings and be prepared to discuss them. This format is one way tutors may keep updated on local and national WCenter tutoring concerns.

## Any Questions?

A short handbook such as this cannot cover everything, so feel free to talk with me about any questions or difficulties you may have.

If you would like to use your tutoring as the basis for an individual topics course, an EN 385, please talk with me and we will try to arrange something.

Though our services are free for Washburn students and Topeka residents, outside the Writing Center you should charge a modest but reasonable fee for any tutoring you do on your own time. The dept. secretary usually handles requests for tutors, so check with Sally if you would like to be on the list of those willing to do tutoring outside of the Center.

## Any Suggestions?

I would also appreciate any suggestions you may have about how to make the Writing Center better: in serving the needs of the students and in providing a pleasant environment for tutoring and study.

(I would like to acknowledge my debt to members of the Midwest Writing Centers Association for sharing information used in this handout, particularly the Learning Skills Center at Kearney State College for information used in the writing consultant's job description.)